

NEWS FROM THE ASSOCIATION

Lift the Lantern High!

Bookstore and Club Volunteers join forces to support The Lantern Bookstore

By Joanna Corman '95

Consider this for serendipity: This winter, a lawyer came into the Lantern, Bryn Mawr College's used and rare bookstore in Washington, D.C., wanting to buy a book that looked old as a Christmas gift for a colleague, a private investigator.

The Lantern is full of old books, so after a thorough search, the volunteers produced a two-volume 1820's biography of Eugène François Vidocq, an 18th-century French criminal who later became a noted police officer and criminal investigator. Various literary characters, including Inspector Javert from *Les Misérables*, are based on him.

This kind of story is typical for the all-volunteer Lantern, which has been selling books to benefit college scholarships for Bryn Mawr since 1977.

Since the fall, the Lantern has been



Clockwise from top left: 3241 P. Street, N.W. was purchased in 1995 with the help of Louisa Ouidi Bilon '38 and her husband George, who generously provided the mortgage; Sue Swisher '60 is just one of the store's amazing and dedicated volunteers; What's a Bryn Mawr bookshop without an owl and something Greek? Volunteers Elizabeth Margosches '70 (left) and Barbara Knopf '60 at the desk; The Lantern is a great place to kick back and browse.



From left: Susan Flinn '86 (D.C. Club President), Caroline Willis '66 (Bookstore Volunteer), and Elizabeth "Libbo" Williams '47 (Bookstore Manager).

undergoing a period of renewal. For the first time, the Lantern and the Bryn Mawr Club of Washington, D.C., are working together, with club officers keeping the store open at night twice monthly and also joining the Lantern's volunteer roster. Both institutions have had sporadic interactions over the years but never cultivated a close relationship until now.

The partnership grew out of a recent encounter between a club officer and a long-time Lantern volunteer at a Bryn Mawr event. The Lantern volunteer asked the club officer why the club doesn't take a greater interest in the shop.

The Lantern sells enough books, vinyl LPs, and CDs to send an average of \$35,000 annually to Bryn Mawr's Alumnae Regional Scholars Program. The bookstore proceeds benefit sophomores from the mid-Atlantic.

"We're very much about the same thing—the Bryn Mawr experience: educating bright young women, keeping them engaged in the world," says Susan K. Flinn '86, club co-president and a recent Lantern volunteer. "We looked at each other [at a club board meeting] like, 'Why aren't we involved?' It's one of those things that's so blindingly obvious that you just don't see until it's pointed out to you."

In September, the club's board passed

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a resolution pledging to support the Lantern.

Flinn, a public health consultant, is spearheading the effort and started volunteering about four hours a week.

Lantern volunteers are welcoming the new partnership. Most volunteers are retired Bryn Mawr graduates and not agile enough to lift heavy boxes. Given the recent shortage of help, longtime volunteers are thrilled.

"They have been blessings, godsend, kicks-in-the-pants, sparkplugs, and have just done wonders," says Caroline Willis '66, a rare book appraiser who has been volunteering at the Lantern since 1984.

"They're much more focused on the look of the store, the arrangement, the ease of finding what you're looking for. They've just come in—I wouldn't say cleaning out the Augean stables as a

labor of Hercules—but pretty close. Just sharpening the place up and organizing so we can do our book-work much more smoothly."

With the club's help, the Lantern for the first time is offering evening hours. In January, club board officers started keeping the store open until 7:30 p.m. two Wednesdays each month. After May, both entities will decide whether to make the change permanent.

The new volunteers also have done significant reorganizing.

"It may be that so many of the things they are doing you might read as a tweak, but it just makes all the difference," Willis says. "It's new life and new blood, and it lightens everybody's load."

The store has the good fortune of being located in high-end Georgetown, within walking distance of Georgetown University, says Elizabeth "Libbo" Williams '47, president of the Lantern board and a veteran Lantern volunteer. The cream-colored brick, two-story row house is a former residence and art gallery located on a cobblestone street. Named after Lantern Night, the freshman-year College ritual that celebrates the passing down of knowledge, the store has a framed photo of the college's most famous graduate, Katharine Hepburn and is bedecked with Bryn Mawr lanterns and owls that give it a quirky feel.

"It's a cozy store," Williams says. "It's a place that welcomes you. When you walk in, you want to look around." Flinn is grateful the club now supports the Lantern because together they are strengthening the Bryn Mawr community.

"The Lantern gives us an opportunity to have a gathering place and a physical manifestation of ideas and learning, which is one of the ways in which we build community," she says. "It's a focal point for sharing ideas and a love of learning, which are very Bryn Mawr values."

Interested in volunteering at the Lantern? Contact Susan Flinn '86 at susan@susanflinn.com. ♦